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Reviews

Relationship-based Social Work
Getting to the heart of practice

Edited by Gillian Ruch, Danielle Turney and Adrian Ward
London. Jessica Kingsley, 2010, 272pp
ISBN 978 1 84905 003 6 (pbk) £19.99 / US\$32.95

This book explores the use of self in social work, the nature of relationships and the impact on the professional. It echoes a lot of the current themes within social work education where students are encouraged to explore their use of self in social work and develop an understanding of emotional intelligence, 'to co-operate and collaborate with others in mutually rewarding relationships' (Howe, 2008, p.14)

In the introduction the editors outline the main features they wish to consider thus describing the structure of the book and the tasks they ascribe to the contributors. Section 1 explores the context, theoretical frameworks and use of self. Section 2 looks at 'working with the relationship in practice', from the nature of service users and their issues to the varieties and complexities of feelings that working relationships can engender. Section 3 debates the different perspectives on relationships within social work from social worker, service user, supervisory relationship to working within an organisation.

From the outset it seeks to open up the debate around relationship based social work by recognising the nature of power, anti-oppressive practice and partnership and collaboration (p.21). What it also recognises is that one cannot ignore the role that wider systems have to play in all working relationships.

In Section 1 there were some links to material that is currently used to develop a sense of self in students and social workers, for example, Johari Window (Luft, 1984, p.60)

Section 2 uses case studies in a variety of ways to explore how 'the

relationship worked in practice' (p.67). It explores the number of emotional contexts within which practitioners engage with services users. Some of the contributors use reflective case studies based on their interviews, which acknowledge their feelings when talking to service users about the nature of relationships, one such being in Chapter 4 where they talk about the importance of them establishing rapport. The writing is very open and honest and draws one into the experience. There is a clear acknowledgment of the need to use the personal as well as professional self and to 'stay with whatever was emerging' rather than 'jump in and fix whatever was wrong' (p.81). The nature of short term work, particularly within a multicultural context, both in terms of the team and service user group, was considered (p.85). It looks at slowing down the process, creating 'relational reflexivity' (p.94) and allows for the use of feelings within the worker to prompt a recognition and exploration of emotions within the service users.

The use of self in situations of 'Anger, Aggression and Hostility' (p.102) is raised where sustainability of relationships can be an issue. The studies give an honest insight into the practitioners' perspectives, their fears and vulnerabilities. It explores the ignoring of intuition, the gut feeling that something has changed. It considers 'the Use of self: the traumatised self and the coping self' (p.112) the contention being that the social worker copes and removes themselves from the threatening situation. The traumatised self then comes into play and mourns the loss of what they thought they had or had to do in their professional role. What is interesting is that the chapter reviewing working with individuals who have depression (p.125) takes it from a Freudian psychoanalytic perspective. I would argue that perhaps this is limited and students would need to be encouraged to consider other writers (Howe, 2010, p.161). Moving through an exploration of the concerns that can arise when a practitioner gets too close, emotionally, to a service user the book looks at long term work and the use of self. It concludes this section by addressing endings where we are invited to consider that both workers and service users will have their ways of dealing with endings encompassing experiences of separations, loss and rejection. There is a positive view that the worker's role can be a developmental one enabling service users with coping skills for the future

In Section 3 we begin to explore the HOW of educating students to work with self. It revisits methods that look at self-knowledge,

either within a group or individually. It looks at the use of supportive meetings with other students, reflective writing, role modelling, group discussions and seminars. Chapter 12 invites us to consider the service user perspective through a consideration of approaches such as power and control, practical support, and emotional intelligence (p.205). I found it refreshing that views were sought from people who had a positive view of social work. When moving on to comment on the supervisory relationship, which featured as important throughout, the conclusion could be seen to mirror the service user practitioner relationship, starting where the supervisee is at and not where the supervisor wants them to be.

So how does the book finish? It looks at the future and would seem to argue that relationship based social work is currently in a vulnerable position. Can it 'find an effective political or cultural voice'? (p.236). It left me feeling unsure but with a small voice of hope that, in the current political and financial climate, in tune with social and cultural commentators (p.243) there might be a drive from social work to a refocus on values, social relationships and relationship- based practices.

In conclusion, this is a readable book overall, well designed in that it uses case studies to illustrate the points it seeks to make, a method students seem to find helpful. The chapters have neat conclusions that summarise key points made throughout each. The three sections are all important in that professional relationships are complex and notions of how they should be conducted have changed. In terms of addressing groupwork issues, relationship skills and knowledge of self are as crucial to working within groups as they are on a one to one basis. A worker within a groupwork setting would need to have a clear understanding of all of the above and have access to a solid supervisory relationship. In my view the key sentences within this book are applicable to all work settings

The helpful professional is the one who is prepared to be involved, to get in touch with the services user's inner world and the pain they will find there.' But 'boundaries are necessary, both to foster the autonomy of the service user and to allow the survival of the worker. (p.162)

I would recommend this book to students, lecturers and practitioners who are keen to develop an understanding of practice in relation

to emotional intelligence and use of self. Ultimately what this book advocates is reciprocity and a belief in self and the people who use the services.

Reference

Howe D. (2010) *The Emotionally Intelligent Social Worker*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan

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*A Practical Guide to Working with Involuntary Clients
in Health and Social Care*
Maggie Kindred
London, Jessica Kingsley, 2011, 140pp
ISBN 9781849051026 (pbk) £16.99 / US\$26.95

Maggie Kindred's text is extremely practical and accessible, covering all the important aspects of social care work with involuntary clients. Within her definition of 'involuntary' she includes those clients who are defined as requiring intervention by external decision-makers such as courts and child protection services, to those who have no alternative but to accept help with daily living because of age-related infirmity or on-going disability. She attends to the principles underpinning this work such as power, helping, non-verbal communication, making contact etc.

The key benefit of the book lies in Maggie Kindred's capacity to encourage workers to develop a critically analytical approach to their work. Readers are helped to explore beyond the 'doing' of the task in order to understand the issues which underpin their work. The chapter

on power is an excellent example of this. Readers are asked to consider the way they use power – what words do we use to convey a difficult message? When do we deceive by not being completely honest about labels/terms? What power relations exist between ourselves and our colleagues? Likewise, the chapters on ‘your philosophy,’ ‘helping others’ and ‘rights’ require readers to think about their own values and beliefs and begin to develop a more analytical and questioning approach to their work. The chapters are short and succinct, so although they deal with conceptual ideas, they do so in an easily digestible, straightforward manner. The chapter on ‘helping others’ is a good illustration of this – encouraging readers to unpick the nature of the helping relationship and to offer practical suggestions as to how to engage in such a relationship with a person who has no choice but to accept your ‘help’. Other chapters tackle more practical issues such as ‘dress’ but, again, help the reader to think more critically and analytically about, what might seem on the surface, quite straightforward topics. This endeavour is helped by the inclusion of simple yet effective and thought-provoking exercises for readers to undertake, all designed to promote reflection, discussion and analysis. Each chapter includes a succinct summary of the key points.

Another engaging characteristic of the book, is Maggie Kindred’s use of illustrative examples from her own practice experience (‘I remember when...’). She does not shirk from using examples which, upon reflection, she can see might have not been best practice and, in this way, she brings a real humanity and warmth to her writing. This quality also conveys the message that this is a difficult area of work and that none of us can get it right all of the time – especially when learning.

In chapter 13, there is a short section on working with groups of involuntary clients and Maggie Kindred given a useful idea about how to begin a group, building around the clients’ own worries and concerns to develop a spontaneous agenda. She suggests that ‘this exercise builds on people’s real agendas, rather than a “parenting programme” or an “anger management course”’. (p. 117) and proposes that such courses could follow on from this. I wondered, however, whether more links might have usefully been made here from the principles and issues already covered to manualised, prescriptive forms of groupwork, such as anger management programmes, which so abound in the fields of working with certain groups of involuntary clients. Having said that, readers themselves can apply the principles as they are made so comprehensible

and accessible throughout the text.

Finally, such a readable and practical book might be of most use to those somewhat unfamiliar with critical analysis – either social care workers or social work students near the beginning of their training. It would be an extremely useful core text for first year social work students, or for use on any training course for unqualified workers working with older people, those with disabilities, child protection or criminal justice service-users.

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Let's Talk Relationships

Activities for exploring love, sex, friendship and family with young people

Vanessa Rogers

London, Jessica Kingsley, 2010, 160pp

ISBN 9781849051361 (pbk) £17.99 / US\$29.95

A significant amount of my professional career has involved managing a young people's health and information service which included sexual and contraceptive services, so it was with great interest that I approached this book. Although activity based, the book or manual is addressing an area that many people (for as many reasons) find difficult to discuss, engage or open up with young people.

In the early years of the 21st Century there are as many concerns as there are opportunities to address young peoples' sexual health and wellbeing; the re-emergence and increase in rates of Chlamydia and HIV amongst young people in the western world and in contrast increasing opportunities for professionals, parents and others to engage with and talk about these important and sometimes life changing issues.

The cover of the book promises that it offers '*a multitude of creative ways to get young people aged 13-19 talking about positive relationships, helping them to stay safe, healthy and happy*' and I had a strong sense

that it is clearly written by a very experienced teacher/youth – worker and community educator who has worked collaboratively with young people and many others trying and testing the 90 activities described.

This is a key strength of this practical resource and responds extremely well to the roles of these professions and the growing awareness within peer groups, families, schools and communities for the need to look at and discuss what constitutes safe, healthy and happy relationships. There is a role for many people including educators, parents and peers and this resource supports the reality that these issues are everybody's business.

The book comprises six chapters which are helpfully sequenced to mirror the groupwork process:

- The Group
- Getting to Know Each Other
- Friendship & Peer Groups
- Living at Home
- Love, Sex and all That
- Evaluations & Findings

The author makes the use of activities easier for the reader by including three elements which pre-empt and respond to the questions the reader and participants would probably ask about each of the activities i.e. what is the *Aim*, what *You Will Need* and *How to Do it*.

Although the author respects the potential of interactive learning and the fun and creativity this can inspire there is serious recognition of the responsibility that comes when opening up dialogue about love, sex, friendship and families. This requires the facilitator to be careful, aware and prepared for the potential for sensitive, personal, legal and factual minefields.

This potential is addressed in a number of ways; cautionary notes and advice, stress on the learning with peers as opposed to being informed by adults, and activities themselves which focus on:

- Confidentiality
- Duty of Care/Care and Protection
- Contracts
- Using other specialist resources, phone lines and websites

As a 'how to' book I felt that this book could have benefited from having a lead in to each chapter to frame it and set the scene. It is clear that many people have been trying and testing the activities and I would have liked to have read about their experiences and reflections in the form of quotes or narratives.

Overall this book does what it says on the cover and has added further pragmatism in the form of photo-copy -able pages. For those considering, starting, actively engaging or developing peer learning with young people on these really important issues this book provides a comprehensive range of supporting activities that can bring young people's ideas, questions and experiences to life.

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